THE MINISTER OF PANCHAYATI RAJ (SHRI MANI SHANKAR AIYAR): (a) No, Sir, not by the Government of India.

(b) to (d) Questions do not arise.

Uniformity in panchayats

1103. SHRI RAVULA CHANDRA SEKAR REDDY: Will the Minister of PANCHAYATI RAJ be pleased to state:

(a) whether his Ministry has initiated a major step to bring in uniformity in the functioning and structures of panchayats across the country:

(b) if so, the complete details thereof;

(c) whether Government have organized any mega conferences during the last three years of non-political players active in different States on social issues especially on panchayats; and

(d) if so, the details and the outcome thereof?

THE MINISTER OF PANCHAYATI RAJ (SHRI MANI SHANKAR AIYAR): (a) and (b) No, Sir. Ministry of Panchayati Raj have not requested any State Government to bring uniformity in the functioning and structure of Panchayats across the country. 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992 provides broad framework to the States to enact their own Panchayati Raj Act. However, the Ministry of Panchayati Raj persuades the State Governments to follow the best practices from other States keeping in view their own requirements.

(c) and (d) Ministry of Panchayati Raj convened seven Round Table Conferences with the State Ministers in charge of Panchayati Raj between July, 2004 and December, 2004. A set of 150 action points were evolved by consensus and adopted unanimously at the conclusion of the last Round Table in Jaipur in December, 2004. Consultative mechanisms have been set up by the Government of India and State Governmens to follows up the Round Table Conferences which comprise a Council of State Ministers of Panchayati Raj under the Chairmanship of the Union Minister for Panchayati Raj and a Committee of Chief Secretaries of States and State Panchayati Raj Secretaries under the Chairmanship of the Union Secretary (Panchayati Raj). Seven meetings of State Secretaries of Panchayati Raj have been held between April, 2005 and September, 2006 and two meetings

of the Council of State Ministers in charge of Panchayati Raj held during August, 2005 and June, 2006. The NDC Empowered Sub-Committee on Devolution has also been brought under the chairpersonship of the Minister of Panchayati Raj and has since held three meetings in June, September and December 2006.

Besides, the Union Minister has visited over 150 Gram Sabhas, Village Panchayats, Intermediate Panchayats and District Panchayats across 21 States/Union Territories and with 19 of them concluded State-specific Joint Statements of Conclusions. (The Joint Statement with Tamil Nadu is under consideration and it was decided not to proceed with Chandigarh and the Chandigarh Administration intends to incorporate all panchayats areas in Municipality).

In addition, two mega Conferences have been held. The first conference on the 'State of Panchayats and way forward' was held from 16-18 December, 2005 in New Delhi which was attended by Research Scholars, activists, functionaries and elected representatives of Panchayats. The second conference of 'Writers and Thinkers' was held in June, 2006 to discuss all aspects of Panchayati Raj in India including the measures to strengthen Panchayati Raj and to take it forward.

Full details on all these measures will be found in the "State of Panchayats—Mid-Term Review and Appraisal" submitted to the House in three volumes on 23 November, 2006.

Backward Regions Grant Fund

†1104. SHRI BASHISTHA NARAIN SINGH: Will the Minister of PANCHAYATI RAJ be pleased to state:

(a) the districts in the State of Bihar included under Backward Regions Grant Fund (BRGF);

(b) the salient featrues of the scheme;

(c) the details of the works which would be taken up in various districts under this scheme and regulatory mechanism thereof;

(d) the role of Panchayats in this regard; and

(e) the manner in which Government would provide training to representatives of Panchayats for proper implementation of the scheme?

† Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.